

Take to Task What's not working

Keep sidewalks wireless

If you're a pedestrian in our fair city, you've probably encountered at least one tangled mess of utility wire dangling from a pole and piled in the sidewalk or street. If it happens to you this month, here's a tip on who to contact.

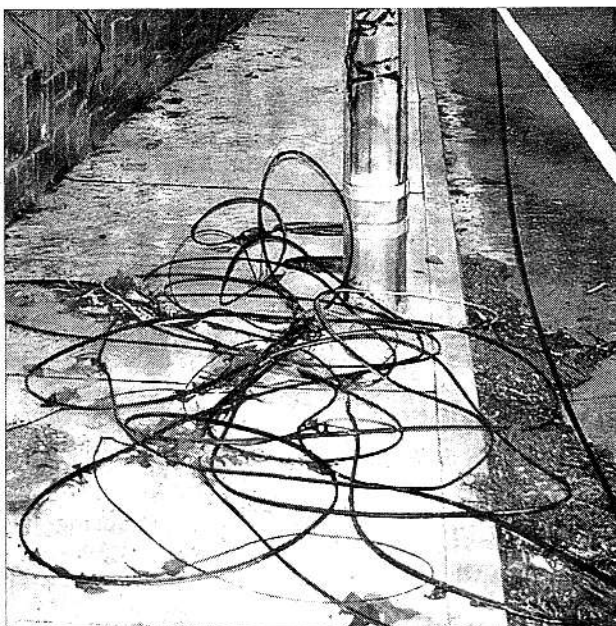
During March, the pedestrian advocacy group PEDS is conducting a hazardous wire hunt. You can help them make the metro area's sidewalks safer and have a chance to win a prize in the process.

PEDS wants to collect as many reports of loose, hazardous wires as possible in Alpharetta, Atlanta, Conyers, Decatur, Dunwoody, Marietta, Newnan, Roswell, Sandy Springs and Stone Mountain, as well as in unincorporated Clayton, Cobb, Fulton and Gwinnett counties. The organization is turning those reports over directly to the local jurisdiction and urging those governments to put pressure on Georgia Power, which PEDS community education director Michael Orta says is ultimately responsible for removing the wires.

"Most wires are owned by Comcast, AT&T and other companies," Orta says, "but in most cases Georgia Power is ultimately responsible for removing the wires because they own the pole. Even if the hazardous wires themselves don't belong to Georgia Power, it is the company's responsibility to monitor the safety of any wires attached to its pole."

Orta says local jurisdictions should hold Georgia Power accountable for removing the hazardous wires and encourage them to "put teeth into their programs" for doing so.

"If a government is notified of a hazardous wire," Orta says, "they should give Georgia Power a certain number of



Reporting loose utility wires that create unsafe conditions for pedestrians could win you a prize. PEDS

days to resolve the problem. After that, daily fines should be charged."

Orta points to Atlanta, where he says the city has provisions in its franchise agreements with utilities to charge penalties and fines. Then there's the liability issue.

"Government agencies can protect themselves from liability by asking Georgia Power to fix the problem and fining them if they don't," Orta says. "If the local jurisdiction is notified there's a problem and action isn't taken, there could be a liability issue."

The wire hunt

To participate in PEDS' wire hunt, write down the location of loose, abandoned wires that are unsafe for pedestrians. Report them online at www.peds.org and upload a photo, if possible. Then cross your fingers. Drawings for prizes — which include a \$75 Phidippides gift certificate, a high-tech pedometer and more — will be this Wednesday and again on March 31.

More info: peds.org/wire-hunt

ity issue."

This is the second wire hunt PEDS has conducted in memory of John Lamb, an Atlanta resident killed in February 2006 when the bicycle he was riding became entangled in loose utility wires dangling from a pole at the intersection of Peachtree Street and Peachtree Battle Avenue. Witnesses said the loose wires had been hanging for months and blocked most of the sidewalk. A wrongful death lawsuit filed by Lamb's family against the city of Atlanta, Georgia Power and BellSouth was settled in December 2007. PEDS' first wire hunt two years ago uncovered more than 200 unsafe sites in Atlanta alone.

With documentation in hand, the group successfully prompted the city and utility companies to clear these wires from the sidewalks.

John Becker

What's broken near you?

We want tips from across metro Atlanta. Call us at 404-526-7003 or e-mail us at fixit@ajc.com